

## Cabinet

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**Date of Meeting:** 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021

**Report Title:** Policy on the Pre-purchase of Graves at Cheshire East Cemeteries

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr. Jill Rhodes, Public Health and Corporate Services

**Senior Officer:** Frank Jordan, Executive Director - Place

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### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report proposes to adopt a policy (see Appendix 1) to cease advance purchases of graves in all cemeteries where there is less than 20 years of capacity of new grave supply.
- 1.2. However, in recognising the need for individuals and families to prepare for their passing or that of a relative, the Council will permit advance purchase on compassionate grounds where the applicant can present medical evidence which indicates likely forthcoming need within a year.
- 1.3. In Cheshire East, demand for burial provision is currently met by Cheshire East Council's eleven cemeteries, together with town and parish cemeteries and churchyards. Even accounting for projected increases in the number of deaths, our Cemeteries Strategy (2019) indicates there is sufficient capacity within the council's cemeteries overall to meet demand for new graves for over 30 years. However, individual cemeteries will run out of space for new graves sooner than this.
- 1.4. The pre-purchase of graves allows relatives to be buried in close proximity. Whilst there is plenty of capacity in a cemetery it is desirable to permit this practice. However, as an individual cemetery approaches capacity it is normal practice to manage the availability of grave space.

## 2. Recommendations

### 2.1. That Cabinet

- 2.1.1. Approves the revised Policy as set out at Appendix 1 for the pre-purchase of graves at Cheshire East managed Cemeteries.
- 2.1.2. Delegates authority to the Executive Director- Place to take any necessary actions to implement the policy.

## 3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. The policy will protect the availability of grave space to cater for local need into the years when the cemetery nears capacity.

## 4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. The other option is to continue to allow the pre-purchase of graves. However, if all grave plots are pre-sold, this reduces the option for people to be buried locally. It is considered that ending pre-purchase in any Cemetery with less than 20 years of capacity of new grave supply is a fairer way of managing the remaining grave stock.

## 5. Background

- 5.1. The current estimate of grave supply at the Council's cemeteries is:

Cemetery	Available graves (From Cemetery Strategy)	Demand in 2020 (actual demand)	Estimated capacity in years
Alderley Edge	1,322	24	55
Congleton	792	9	88
Crewe Meadow Brook	6,705	38	175
Macclesfield	2,718	48	56
Nantwich	918	38	24
Sandbach	235	30	8
Weston	19	1	19
Wilmslow	283	10	28
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12,992</b>	<b>198</b>	

- 5.2. There has been a rise in the popularity of funeral planning. Individuals and families do like to pre-purchase graves. This ensures that relatives can be buried in either the same grave or in close proximity. Whilst there is plenty of capacity in a cemetery it is desirable to permit this practice.

5.3. This table shows the graves purchased since January 2020.

Cemetery	Purchased at need.	Pre-purchased graves Between 1/1/20 to 6/11/20
Alderley	11	13
Congleton	7	2
Coppenhall	0	0
Crewe	2	0
Macclesfield	40	8
Meadow Brook	22	14
Nantwich	27	11
Sandbach	12	18
Weston	1	0
Wilmslow	7	3

5.4. The proposed policy can be found in Appendix 1. Alongside the policy Cheshire East Council will maintain a baseline assessment of the residual capacity (graves available for purchase) at each cemetery. This residual capacity is monitored on an annual basis. By utilising the average of graves required at each cemetery each year, it is possible to calculate the remaining capacity in years for each cemetery. Where the remaining capacity falls below 20 years, this policy to stop the pre-purchase of graves will be activated at that cemetery. This will help to ensure that graves remain available for purchase when needed.

5.5. This policy is proposed to supersede any previous policy or arrangements. It would be adopted in order to provide a continuing supply of graves in any given cemetery for as long as possible.

## 6. Implications of the Recommendations

### 6.1. Legal Implications

6.1.1. In accordance with the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 in which it is stated: “3.—(1) *Subject to the provisions of this order, a burial authority may do all such things as they consider necessary or desirable for the proper management, regulation and control of a cemetery*” the Council is at liberty to amend its “Policy on the pre-purchase of graves at Cheshire East Cemeteries” as it sees fit. However, in exercising this discretion it should show reasonable regard to the interests of the public in terms of availability of local graves for those who wish to be buried or have a loved one buried. The suggested amendment to the policy seems a sensible way to guard against the supply of graves being curtailed by reason of pre-purchase as opposed to purchase at point of need.

## **6.2. Finance Implications**

6.2.1. There are no significant financial implications of stopping pre-purchase of graves at cemeteries have less than 20 years capacity.

## **6.3. Policy Implications**

6.3.1. This is a new policy aimed at the fair distribution of graves over the last 20 years remaining cemetery capacity.

## **6.4. Equality Implications**

6.4.1. There are no direct implications for equality.

## **6.5. Human Resources Implications**

6.5.1. There are no direct implications for human resources.

## **6.6. Risk Management Implications**

6.6.1. There is a risk the policy may have small scale financial implications in ceasing to allow Pre-purchase of graves in Cemeteries with less than 20 years life.

## **6.7. Rural Communities Implications**

6.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities.

## **6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1. There are no direct implications for children and young people.

## **6.9. Public Health Implications**

6.9.1. There are no direct implications for public health.

## **6.10. Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1. Facilitating burials close to local communities reduces the need for travel and so reduces the carbon footprint of burials.

## **7. Ward Members Affected**

7.1. The Council manages 11 cemeteries across the Borough.  
[https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/register\\_office/cemeteries/cemeteries-and-crematoria.aspx](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/register_office/cemeteries/cemeteries-and-crematoria.aspx)

## **8. Consultation & Engagement**

8.1. Policy developed in conjunction with Bereavement service provider Orbitas.

## **9. Access to Information**

- 9.1. The background information on Cemetery capacity is available in the CEC Cemeteries Strategy. <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/orbitas/cec-cemeteries-strategy-march-2019.pdf>

## **10. Contact Information**

- 10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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